

SIGNAL
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U.S. versus Soviet Military Strength: *points of view*

"The global military situation that will confront Jimmy Carter as he takes office January 20 differs significantly from that faced by any of his predecessors since 1945. The difference arises from the growth of Soviet military strength and the relative decline of American power over the past 10 years."

The New York Times, January 4, 1977

By Charles DeVore

SINCE 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union have become the world's top military superpowers. Which, if either, has superior military strength is the subject of a continuing debate among military and civilian defense analysts.

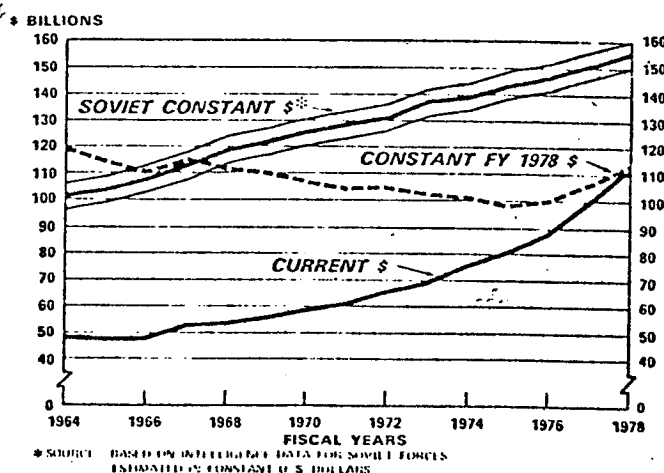
That debate intensified in 1977, partly, perhaps, because of a new administration, headed by a President who has been outspoken in his views on arms reduction and in eventual "elimination of nuclear weapons from the earth," and because the first strategic arms agreement—SALT I—expires this October. President Carter's views are certain to be reflected in the actions of his administration, with emphasis on defense spending and arms control.

National Intelligence Estimate

The defense budget a President submits to Congress is guided by the general conclusions in what is called the National Intelligence Estimate, an analysis of the strategic capabilities and intentions of the Soviet Union. "Intentions" are what you want to do; "capabilities" are what you can do with what you have available. The United States prepares and publishes estimates of Soviet military capabilities; Soviet intentions are more difficult to assess, because the Soviet Union is a closed society. As Winston Churchill said, "(Russia) is a riddle wrapped in a mystery shrouded in an enigma."

This year's National Intelligence Estimate, at least

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
BASELINE FORCES BUDGET TRENDS
(TOA — \$ BILLIONS)



Source: Department of Defense
DOD Budget trend has been downward for nearly a decade in real (constant dollar) terms, turned the corner in FY '76, made more substantial gains in FY '77, and kept moving in the proposed FY '78 budget and its revisions. (Baseline forces excludes budget for military retired pay and foreign military assistance.) It still remains 35-40 per cent below the estimated Soviet defense budget, which has shown a consistent increase of about 2 per cent annually.